TWENTY FIVE YEARS ON...
WHY WE SAY...

The Troops must go!

A *Socialist Worker* pamphlet

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TWENTY FIVE YEARS TOO LONG

At 5pm on August 14th, 1969, British troops were ordered onto the streets of Derry. The next day it was the turn of Belfast. A Whitehall spokesperson said they would be out by the weekend. A quarter of a century later they are still there.

Top policemen, politicians, church leaders and businessmen all insist that the role of the troops has been to keep Catholics and Protestants from fighting a civil war.

The most common argument in defence of the troops is that if they withdrew there would be a bloodbath.

But twenty five years on, it is clear that the troops were never intended as a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland. They have been used to prop up a discredited system. The army is part of the problem in Northern Ireland and the troops should be removed at once.

CIVIL RIGHTS MARCHES

The troops arrived in Northern Ireland as a result of the British governments attempts to gain control of a street rebellion.

The rebellion started when the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association found that its demands were not being met. They had wanted an end to discrimination in housing. They demanded "one man, one vote" because rich business men could have as many as 25 votes in local elections while many of the poor both Catholic and Protestant, were denied a vote.

The B-Specials started bloody confrontations with those who marched for civil rights. The B Specials were an exclusively Protestant force that were sometimes recruited directly from Orange Halls. They were part of the official security forces of the Northern State.

As the the summer of '69 wore on, loyalists escalated their attacks on Catholic housing estates in Belfast and Derry. Homes were burned and Catholics were driven out of estates by the Shankill Defence Association which later went on to become the UDA. Five percent of all Catholics in Belfast were forced to move house.

Finally, a confrontation between the RUC and residents of the Catholic Bogside in Derry turned into a full-scale riot. The "Battle of the Bogside" marked a turning point in the struggle.

For the first time the RUC was beaten and driven back towards the city centre. To add to problems of the police the rioting spread to other towns across Northern Ireland, including Belfast.

The Unionist Prime Minister Chichester-Clarke, played his last card. 8,500 B Specials were mobilised. As the RUC were beaten back the Specials gathered behind them ready to join the fray.

It was at this point that the British Army arrived on the streets for the first time. The British government were becoming nervous about the antics of the Unionists.

The troops were sent to restore the viability of a regime which was seriously discredited at that point.

As the British government announcement put it at the time: "The Government of Northern Ireland had informed the UK Government that as a result of the severe and prolonged rioting in Londonderry, it has no alternative but to ask for the assistance of troops at present stationed in Northern Ireland to prevent a breakdown of law and order."

When the army arrived in Belfast they were welcomed in Catholic areas as a protection against the RUC and Loyalist mobs. But it soon became clear what their real purpose was.

KEEPERS OF THE PEACE?

The British army are described more often than not as peace keepers, yet since their arrival in Northern Ireland over 3,400 people have met violent deaths, and well over 32,000 have been injured.

Right from the start the troops have been involved in shoot-to-kill.

■ On 11th October 1969 a British soldier shot dead George Dickie during a riot on the Shankill Road. Since then 294 people have been killed by the army. They have ambushed and assassinated republicans, opened fire on peaceful demonstrations and shot people as they walked down the street.

■ Thirty seven republicans have been killed by the SAS in ambushes. Amnesty International have commented that "the pattern emerged that suspects are arbitrarily killed rather than being arrested, members of the security forces operate with impunity."

■ In 1970 3,000 troops invaded the Falls and five people were killed and dozens wounded. Two years later, on what become Bloody Sunday, paratroopers killed fourteen Catholic civilians who were on an anti-internment demonstration.

The British establishment has never condemned the army's role in Bloody Sunday. It has tried to argue that some of the victims were members of the IRA and thus exonerate the army.

■ Aidan McAnespie was shot dead as he walked past a border checkpoint. The soldier who shot him claimed his finger slipped on the trigger. Seventeen joyriders have died at the hands of the security forces.

■ Since 1972, plastic bullets have killed 16 people in the North. They have seriously injured many others. All except one of those who died were Cathlics.

Six were aged 14 or under. At least five were expressly declared by inquests not to be involved in rioting.

So far only one British soldier has ever been convicted of murder. Ian Thain was sentenced to life imprisonment for shooting a civilian in the back. He served only two years before being released and returning to active service in Northern Ireland.

Constant harassment of working class areas, particularly Catholic, is usual for the army. Verbal or physical intimidation frequently accompanies questioning about where someone is going, why, and who who to see.

Over 330,000 house searches have been carried out, one can last for several hours and can mean the complete destruction of possessions and property.

In one month alone, during the IRA hunger strikes of 1981, a total of 16,656 plastic bullets were fired in Northern Ireland.

Time and again soldiers have assaulted civilians on the street. In Coalisland in 1992 members of the parachute regiment went on the rampage twice within days. They attacked both Catholics and Protestants in pubs and on the street leaving three people with bullet wounds in the legs. The attacks caused such outrage that even a Unionist politician felt it necessary to call for the paras withdrawal.

It is quite clear that for twenty five years the army has been engaged as a repressive force, not a peace keeping one.

COLLUSION

The fact that the troops see their role as defending the unionist system against the Catholic community is borne out most starkly in their collusion with the UDA and the UVF.

When they have deemed it necessary the army has encouraged and aided the loyalist paramilitaries to murder Catholics. The collusion has varied from withdrawing patrols shortly before an attack to providing names, addresses and even explosives.

The most notable cases have been:

- The Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974 which were carried out using explosives supplied by British Intelligence.
- In 1980 John Turnley a Protestant who was in the SDLP was shot by UDA member Robert McConnell. At his trial McConnell revealed that he had several meetings with the SAS. They told him that they wanted the leaders of the newly emerging H Block Campaign assassinated.
- In May 1989 two soldiers were given eighteen month suspended sentences for having documents that would aid loyalist paramilitaries. One of them is still in the army. Terence McDaid the brother of one of the people in the file was killed at the address the soldiers had leaked.
- The army told fifteen people in 1992 that loyalist paramilitaries had obtained information on them from "lost" files. In November 1993 army documents on members of Sinn Fein were found in a house in Belfast.

The most damning example of the links between the army and loyalist paramilitaries is that of Brian Nelson.

Nelson was an ex-British soldier who had been in the UDA since 1972. He was recruited to British intelligence in 1983. His army "handler" Colonel J gave Nelson the names, addresses and photos of republicans. Nelson was the chief intelligence officer for the UDA, he collated information and organised sectarian murder.

At one point British intelligence took the entire set of UDA files, updated the information and returned them.

Nelson organised an arms shipment from South Africa of two hundred AK47s and ninety Browning pistols. The army knew of the shipment and did nothing. At least sixty eight Catholics have been killed with the guns.

Not one sectarian attack was stopped because of information from Brian Nelson even though the army knew of them at times two months in advance.

THE ARMY AGAINST WORKERS

Throughout the world the army has been used to prevent working class people fighting for their rights. Northern Ireland is no exception.

In 1907 over 10,000 soldiers were used in Belfast to prevent Catholic and Protestant dock workers from winning better wages and union recognition. Twelve years they were used to stop mainly Protestant engineering and shipyard workers reducing the working week to 44 hours.

Throughout 1977 it was the army and their "green goddesses" that scabbed on the firefighters in an attempt to prevent them winning a wage claim.

In each case Protestant and Catholic workers were fighting side by side. The army was the bosses' life-support machine. Their role was to scab, fight strikers, demoralise workers and maintain the sectarian struggle.

THE IRA

One of the biggest myths about the role of the troops is that they were sent in to deal with the violence of the IRA.

In fact the truth is the other way around. The Provisional IRA emerged as a response to the violence of the troops.

In 1969 the IRA existed in name only. The security forces did not see them as a threat. The RUC Special Branch claimed that the street protests had "caught the IRA largely unprepared in the military sense".

Scotland Yard agreed stating that the IRA is "not organised or equipped to play a significant independent role."

The riots were an embarrassment for the disorganised republicans, and for many Catholics IRA stood for I Ran Away.

That changed with the growth of the Provisonals as hundreds of young angry Catholics saw no other way of fighting the troops than to take up arms.

At the time of the August 1969 riots the Belfast IRA forces numbered only 100-120 members. But according to the historian of the IRA, Boyer Bell, the Befast Brigade numbered 1,000 by 1971.

But after twenty years of armed struggle it is clear that the Provos' armed campaign has won nothing for most Catholics.

The reforms to the Northern State that have been won were done so through the mass mobilisations of the Civil Rights marches. The disbandment of the B Specials, the introduction of one person one vote and housing reforms were all won before the Provisionals fired a shot.

The nature of the armed struggle results in a tiny minority of volunteers isolated from the mass of the population. The campaigns of working class people fall into the background.

What are thought of as military "successes" by the IRA are shortlived and have not lifted the levels of repression in Northern Ireland.

Even worse, bombings such as that of the Shankill Road and of workers at Teebane only increases sectarianism pushing more Protestants into the hands of bigots like Paisley and the UDA.

The overall effect of the armed struggle is to isolate the fight against the Northern state and reinforce communal differences.

TROOPS OUT NOW

Many people fear that in the event of an immediate withdrawal there would be a blood bath.

But this misses the most obvious point that the troops themselves have helped maintain a state of violence. Not only by directly being involved in murders, but by the confidence they give to groups like the UDA to carry out their murders.

In any case, who would be attempting to fight such a civil war?

The IRA only came into existence because of the army and would have far less reason to fight.

There is a much greater threat from the loyalist paramilitaries who have killed more people than the republicans over the last four years, and have a tradition of indiscriminate attacks on Catholic communities.

However the removal of the troops would be a massive blow to these loyalists.

Just as importantly, the UDA/UFF do not have the support of most Protestant workers.

For instance when the UFF killed Catholic Maurice O'Kane in Harland and Wolff shipyard, a workplace where loyalism has had high levels of support in the past, all the workers came out on strike in protest.

This sort of action is the key to ending the violence in Northern Ireland, and preventing a bloodbath.

Protestant and Catholic workers have united time and time again, in opposition to a whole stream of Tory attacks.

They have also united against sectarian murder, not only at Harland and Wolff's but also Shorts, the civil service the bus service.

Workers unity is essential as a way out of the cul-de-sac of the North.

The troops, as in the past, will be used to oppose that unity and will try to smash any large scale workers movement.

THE SOCIALIST SOLUTION

The republican argument for troops out is inadequate as it addresses only the Catholic community and will never win the majority of people in the North.

The socialist argument is different.

The violence of the troops, although mainly directed against Catholics, serves to prop up a society in which working class living standards are constantly under attack.

It is in the interests of both Catholic and Protestant workers to demand that the troops go. In our common struggles it can become clear to everyone that the British Army are part of the problem in Northern Ireland.

Getting rid of the troops will help remove a major obstacle to working class unity and open the way to a lasting peace.

It will help workers in their struggle against the bosses and politicians of both states.

Our goal is the defeat of both states in Ireland, and the creation of socialist society that can provide the jobs, housing, and welfare necessary to end the poverty on which sectarianism thrives.

There is a growing anger in Ireland, both North and South, at the way in which the rich are getting richer, whilst the rest of us suffer.

The Tories are attacking the Health Service, have introduced VAT on fuel, and are even taking away the right to party with their Criminal Justice Bill.

In the South, Reynolds and Spring preside over the second highest unemployment rate in Europe, while at the same time allowing the layoff of hundreds of workers in Irish Steel and TEAM Aer Lingus.

Even worse is the corruption that allows big businessmen like Goodmen to get away with millions of pounds of taxpayers money.

Socialist Worker is building a party North and South that fights these injustices, and looks to workers to win a better world.

If you want to see the troops withdrawn, and agree with our aim of a socialist republic in Ireland, then join us and help establish it.

Join Socialist Worker!

❑ *I want to join Socialist Worker*
❑ *I want a copy of 'Socialist Worker' dropped off each month*
❑ *I want to be kept informed of activities and meetings*

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